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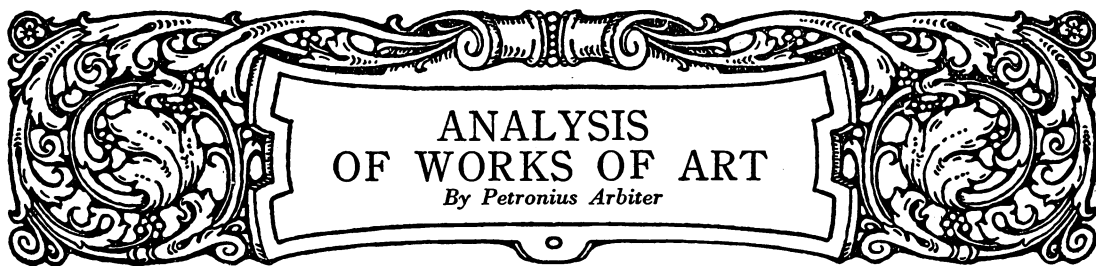
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A GREAT WORK OF ART THE TRIUMPH OF SILENUS BY RUBENS

See page 199

THIS month we begin our promenade among the art works of the world by choosing a comic subject. We do so because we are partisans of the idea that the comic—when clean and fine—is a distinctly lifting force, because it takes us away from the commonplace drudgery of the daily grind.

The truly comic is only less sublime than the tragic because the latter lifts us farther away from the earth-earthly.

This work of Rubens is one of the great gems of the National Gallery of London and one of the finest creations of Rubens and, no doubt, painted entirely by his own hand, unlike many of his larger decorations. And the work oozes with the unctuous joy he must have felt in telling this story in paint.

The work bears evidence on its face that here Rubens deliberately chose a subject—contrary to the notion of some ridiculous faddists of to-day, who, while hating preaching, vociferously preach the idiotic theory that a work of art should have neither subject nor idea!

The work is great because:

First: Having chosen a Subject, and a fine one, one of universal significance and comprehensibility—the delicious story of the triumph of the god of wine—he *conceived* that subject on as high a plane as ever has been done by any man who handled the subject. There is nothing coarse in spirit or act in the picture. It is pure and innocent revelry. Silenus is not beastly drunk, he is only jolly and gay, only "three sheets in the wind" as the sailors say. Nor is any of his band of joy-makers so sunk in wine as to be unfit to join in the revelry. The whole group radiates sane and serene "joy unconfined"!

Second: The Composition is so full of rhythmic, melodious lines that it is full of beauty, and the disposition of all of the figures, their members and heads, is such that the attention is wholly centered on the jolly face of old Silenus. Moreover, Rubens here did not make a slavish copy of any of his models. He idealized their forms, but so modestly that he invested the whole work with a fine style as if a Greek had painted it.

Third: The Expression of the faces of every fig-

ure is profoundly true, but, above all, the face and entire body of Silenus. His face radiates the intense, fat joy of living. It is the Philosophy of Pleasure personified. And this is reinforced by the expression of the rollicking rolls of fat on his arms and torso.

This masterly adequacy of expression Rubens never surpassed in any other of his pictures.

Fourth: As to Drawing. While Rubens' drawing of the figures in some of his works is often careless and sometimes bad, here it is fine, as true yet large as if the impeccable Velasquez had drawn the figures. The drawing and movement are so true that we do not think of the drawing. Thus it should be. Hence, the figures live and have motion.

Fifth: Both as to Color-scheme and fat, juicy richness of tones, its color harks back to Giorgione and Titian more than do most of Rubens' other pictures. In fact, in this respect, it stands out almost alone among his works.

Sixth: Finally its Technique, or brushwork, is of that impersonal yet individual kind which, while we feel it is by Rubens, we are not so sure of it as we are with most of his other works. It is not too "rubensy" as some of his Louvre pictures. We do not at first think of the "technique" until we are compelled to laughter by the gripping life and movement and comedy so marvelously expressed and by the splendor of color. Then only, when we have been truly emotioned, and began to be intellectually curious, do we go up to the picture to examine the methods of craftsmanship of the painter. And so logically it should be.

The result is, a perfectly harmonious unit, a moving picture not only of life, but of ideal life, lifting us into the realm of poetry and joy, a delight for all time. And the more we look at it the more overwhelming and compelling becomes the expression of life, an expression that is truly individual but unmarred, hence unweakened, by any silly cat's-paw marks of a mountebank searching for petty self-advertisement in an exasperating song-and-dance display of "individualism" in craftsmanship.

That is why it is great.

A CLEVER WORK OF ART THE VOYAGE TO CYTHERA BY WATTEAU

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BELIEVING that the public would be pleased to have a fine example of a work of Art belonging to the class Art for Art's Sake exhibited, Watteau's "Embarkation for Cythera" has been chosen; painted in 1714, it is reproduced on page 200.

Gautier said: "Art for Art's sake means, for

its adepts: the pursuit of pure beauty without any other preoccupation."

That is—the slenderest kind of an idea, or no idea at all; no purpose, as Lessing suggests, of any kind; no sentiment or thought—simply beauty of composition and of craftsmanship. Well, in Watteau's



"THE VOYAGE TO CYTHERA" BY WATTEAU

picture we have this mediocre aim realized most cleverly.

Kythera is a large island off the coast of Laconia and in ancient times it was sacred to Venus, who had a famous temple there. The cyclopædia says: "To make the voyage to Cythera is a sort of euphemism which signifies to give one's self up to the pleasures of love." Therefore this celebrated picture of Watteau apotheosizes purely and simply the philosophy of Hedonism so popular at the end of the reign of Louis XIV.

The Messrs. de Goncourt, says this writer, have appreciated with a very fine spirit, and in a highly refined language full of verve, the part that Watteau played in the French school of painting:

"The great poet of the eighteenth century is Watteau. A creation, an entire creation of poetry and revelry has issued from his head, brimming his work with the elegance of a superhuman life which the painter drew from the enchanted visions of his imagination. He has made gracefulness 'to live again.

"With Watteau gracefulness is no longer that of the ancients, a rigorous and solid charm, the perfection of marble-work in the Galatea, the very plastic seductiveness and the material glory of the Venuses. Gracefulness in Watteau is just gracefulness. It consists of that next-to-nothing which drapes a woman with an attractiveness, a coquettishness and a good-looks quite beyond physical beauty. It consists of that subtle thing which seems to be the smile of the line, the soul of form, the spiritual physiognomy of manner. All the seductiveness of woman in repose: languidness, sloth, abandonment of decorum, touches of back to back, extension of limbs, looks of carelessness, a rhythm in poses, the pretty touch of bent-over profiles, the backward movement of bosoms, the supple lines of the feminine body and the play of taper fingers on the handles of fans—and the indiscretion caused by tall heels that peep below the petticoat, and the lucky chances of personal bearing, and the coquetry of gestures, and the play of shoulders and all that knowledge which the mirrors of the last century taught woman—the mimicry of attitude and grace—all these lived again in Watteau with his flower and his Walloon accent!

"And what a stage setting!

"A land that was an accomplice, woods full of gallantry, meadows resounding with music, bosquets fitted for the fun of echoes, trees like cradles from which hang baskets of flowers, delightful deserts far away from jealous persons, refreshed by fountains and peopled with marble statues! Water jets suddenly spring up in the centre of courtyards of farms. Suns befitting apotheoses, lovely sunshine sleeping on greensward, verdurous depths visible and translucent, delicious country charm, murmuring decorations beautifully trimmed, gardens embowered in thickets, rosehedges, French landscapes set with the pine trees of Italy! Villages gay with weddings and coaches and ceremonies, and festivals gone daft with violins and flutes! Rustic scenes with the green curtain and stage backed with blossoms, upon which the Comédie Française ascends, upon which gambols the Comédie Italienne. . . .

"How happily does this Italian fashion, sparkling and bizarre, unite itself to the infantile French fashion of the eighteenth century! And what an adorable mode is born from these two wedded and

interfused fashions—the Watteau mode! A fashion of venturesomeness and freedom, wandering and benign, one that snatches to it the new, the zestful, the provocative; the tailor's shears of an artist that in pure playfulness discovers careless neglect and fine dressing, the negligé of the morning hours and stately dress of the afternoon—shears of the fairies, snipping lively and short, stinting neither the costly stuffs nor the eyes of the gallants; delightful shortening of skirts, ravishing rockery of folds, narrow corsage, baskets of silk from which the flowering flesh emerges! O, ye beribboned shears of Watteau, what a lovely kingdom of coquetry did you not cut and carve in that straightlaced realm of nuns belonging to the Maintenon!

"This literary fantasticality gives perfectly an idea of the agreeable imaginings of the painter of *Fêtes Galantes*; it would be difficult to express in a style more stimulating, charming and seductive, ideas and subjects more contrary to the reality. And with respect to the execution of the pictures Watteau is not a whit less spiritual, original and fantastic."

Here we have a picture devoted to celebrating the joy of living which we call only clever, while the "Triumph of Silenus" on page 199, also devoted to the celebration of the joy of living, we call great. Why is Watteau's picture less great than Rubens'?

First: because the subject chosen by Rubens is of more universal significance—more understandable by mankind at large.

Second: because the subject is more clearly and profoundly expressed.

This is done through a greater concentration of the attention of the beholder on the expression of the figures, accomplished by a greater unity. There is no mass of vague trees, hills, etc., painted in a scene-painter's way, as there is in the picture by Watteau, who began as an apprentice to a "decorator." This divides the attention of the spectator too much between the personages and the landscape, thus weakening the expression and power of impression of his picture.

Moreover Watteau broke up his figures into about eight different groups, each doing different things. Hence he violates the first law of all truly great art—concentration of effects. In fact his whole picture is scattering in its appeal. While in Rubens' picture the appeal is concentrated on Silenus, who easily dominates the picture, and therefore grips us powerfully and instantly emotions us with the definite emotion of humor as we see this lusty expression of hilarity; it becomes an abiding joy as we contemplate it. In other words Rubens' picture is a powerful, masculine expression of intense life, while Watteau's is a weaker and more feminine expression of superficial life.

Third: Rubens' drawing is not only impeccable but powerful, while Watteau's drawing is far less so, giving his effort a far less serious, hence a more dilettante, character. Now impeccable drawing is the most difficult thing in any art and requires the most serious effort.

The total comes to this: while Rubens' work seems the effort of a Titan, Watteau's seems the effort of a be-ribboned, be-laced and be-perfumed dilettante—but a dilettante so very, very skilful and gracious in his artificiality, so graceful in soul, so thoroughly radiating the prevailing spirit of his time that it is

a masterpiece of refined, albeit somewhat theatrical cleverness.

The great need of the American world of art is—artists who can draw in a vigorous, correct and living manner. To do that requires a power of intellectual energy possessed only by a man of strong nervous system, one strong enough to engender a will-power sufficiently gripping to hold the mind and attention true to the closest observation of nature, the most faithfully lifelike rendering of the thing seen. All the better if he slightly stylizes what he sees, as Rubens did.

It must always be remembered by some of our readers that, everything being equal in two works of art, that is the greater of the two which expresses most profoundly and completely the central idea or emotion it is supposed to express: First, in the totality of the work and second, in the one or two faces of the main figures about which the whole drama of the work revolves. In fact, in the final analysis, not composition or drawing or technique or color should be the highest aim in a work of art, but completeness and satisfying adequacy of expression, to which end all the other art powers must act as means and instrument.

The face of Christ in Leonardo's "Last Supper," the face of the Sistine Madonna by Raphael, the faces of the Marquis of Spinola and Justin of Nassau in "The Lances" by Velasquez are the keynotes of those three masterpieces. The adequacy or inadequacy of the rendering of what ought to be expressed on those faces determines the place occupied by each of those pictures in the scale of excellence in the hierarchy of art. In the case of the picture by Velasquez—which he nearly ruined through violating the law of the concentration of effects—he saved it only by the masterly sufficiency with which he expressed on the face of Spinola the sympathetic

gallantry in which he is accepting the keys of Breda from the defeated Justin of Nassau. In fact, these two figures represent the highest flight of Velasquez as an expressive artist.

In this picture by Rubens, on page 199, the expression of the thing to be rendered, namely, the joy of living, is conveyed through the totality of the picture and then in a supreme way through the face and torso of Silenus, while in Watteau's picture the same joy of living is expressed only in the totality of the picture and not with any intensity through the individual figures or groups. In fact, it is evident that Watteau, being fundamentally a decorative and not an expressive artist, sacrificed profundity of expression of emotion to surface and decorative beauty, in which he succeeded. But while the decorative beauty of his picture is no greater than that of Rubens, only different in kind, it falls short in convincing adequacy of expression. Hence, while pleasing to the mind it fails powerfully to rouse our emotion. Rubens' picture not only charms our mind by its supreme intellectual qualities but it stirs our emotion and laughter profoundly—at least when we see it for the first time. That is why it is a great work of art, while Watteau's work, falling short of supreme greatness, is only clever.

But it is so dextrous in touch, so exquisite in melody of line, so deliciously *bravura* in its detail, so suggestive of a Frenchified paradise of Haroun al Raschid, that it is at once a perfect example of motiveless art for art's sake and of spirituelle cleverness; therefore is it fit to serve as a drop-curtain in the greatest opera house in the world to which mankind might come for one of the most necessary medicines—relaxation!

Not seriously great, yet greatly clever, it will never inspire to lofty effort—but it will always help to dispel our gloom.

A TRIVIAL WORK OF ART

"THE POOR FISHERMAN" BY PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

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NOTHING is more important for that portion of the American public which is truly interested in art and æsthetics than the acquisition and the confirming of the habit of discrimination, viz.: of discriminating between the great and the clever, the trivial and the degenerate works of great artists.

For example: Michelangelo, judged by what he accomplished in architecture, sculpture, painting and poetry, was, without a doubt, the greatest all-round artist the world has produced. But should that hypnotize us to refrain from condemning his failures?

His nude "Christ" the most childish "Christ" ever perpetrated. It is worse than trivial and mere waste of good marble.

The same may be said of Puvis de Chavannes. He was one of the world's great artists. His two large decorations of "Peace" and "War" in the Museum of Amiens are two of the greatest achievements in decorative art since the Renaissance—equal in their way even to the best of that epoch, in dignity of conception, splendor of composition, and refined individuality in style and manner of execution.

But, shortly after he painted those grand decorations he seems to have come under the spell of the absurd "Modernists" who did not make the expression of their native individuality their goal, but set out in pursuit of a silly "individualism." That is to say, of a peculiar shouting style or manner, one never heard of or seen before and never to be seen again.

Therefore in his next great decoration, namely, in the Panthéon at Paris "St. Denis Blessing Genevieve," he departed from the consummate elegance and naturalness of the drawing in the Amiens pictures of "Peace" and "War" and adopted a new "system" of draughtsmanship, one giving the impression that the drawing had been done with an axe instead of with a brush or pencil, so angular and coarse it is. And since then nearly all of his works have been marred more or less by such coarse and angular drawing.

On the next page we give an illustration of his "Poor Fisherman," still, perhaps, in the Luxembourg Museum. It is an absolutely trivial work; and, com-